

John Hunter Tavern
Vicinity of Topsham
1.5 mi. N. on State Rte. 24
Sagadahoc County
Maine

HABS No. ME-111

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington Planning and Service Center
1730 North Lynn Street
Arlington, Virginia

JOHN HUNTER TAVERN

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Location: On Topsham-Bowdoinham Rd. (State Rte. 24), W. side, 2.5 mi. NE of intersection with U.S. Rte. 201, Topsham vicinity, Sagadahoc County, Maine.

Present Owner: Guy Leavitt, Boothbay Harbor, Maine (1962).

Present Use: Unoccupied (1962). Demolished c. 1964.

Statement of Significance: Stated to have been oldest building in Brunswick-Topsham area, structure was tavern on stage route from Brunswick to Bowdoinham, Richmond and beyond. Building was largely unaltered; was in semi-collapsing condition in 1962. Original trim, paneling, exterior cornice and fenestration framing were typical of mid-eighteenth century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Original owner, John Hunter, was tavern-keeper. House remained in Hunter family into nineteenth century. Earliest deed in Sagadahoc County Registry (1854) does not give date of transfer from Hunter ownership, but land described as adjacent to Wilson P. Hunter (later Alfred Hunter) property and as including Jane P. Frost's father's homestead. Incomplete chain of title follows:

1854 Deed, May, 1854, Book 1, pp. 106-107.
Jane P. Frost to Dorothy Atkins

1889 Deed, September, 1889, Book 78, p. 500.
Dorothy Ann Atkins to Charles Leavitt

1937 Deed, June, 1937, Book 165, p. 311.
Charles C. Leavitt to Lettie Leavitt

1949 Deed, December, 1949, Book 262, p. 26;
Lettie Leavitt to Guy Leavitt

1965 Deed, January 14, 1965, Book 341, p. 185.
(Land formerly occupied by John Hunter Tavern)
Guy Leavitt to Carl D. Randall and wife Marjorie E.

2. Date of erection: Before 1770, when house was tavern kept by John Hunter. (George Augustus Wheeler and Henry Wheeler, History of Brunswick, Topsham and Harpsell, Maine, Boston, Alfred Rudge & Co., 1878.)

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3. Architect: Unknown.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: None known.
5. Notes on alterations: No major alterations. Brick rectangular chimney approximately 4'-0" wide above roof ridge removed c. 1930; replaced by 1'-9" square chimney. 1878 woodcut (Wheeler and Wheeler, op. cit. shows nine-over-nine-light sash. Photograph c. 1900 (Harmon) shows house substantially as it finally appeared except for subsequent decay. Central rear ell of undetermined date removed c. 1900. Some wainscoting and corner cupboard in first-floor west room and paneling in second-floor southeast room removed c. 1920. Curved partition in first-floor east room was probably later addition.
6. Important old views: 1878 woodcut (Wheeler and Wheeler, op. cit.). Photograph c. 1900 (possession of Ernest R. Harmon, Topsham).
7. Sources of information:
 - a. Primary and unpublished sources: Topsham Town Assessor's Office and Sagadahoc County Registry of Deeds. Interviews with W. Linwood Hunter, Route 24, Topsham, descendant of one of John Hunter's brothers; and Ernest R. Harmon, nephew of last owner, who was born in the house.
 - b. Secondary and published sources: Wheeler and Wheeler, op. cit.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

The Hunter family was influential in early history of Topsham, where John Hunter served as Town Clerk, 1773-75. Structure was occasionally used as a meeting house.

Prepared by Professor Samuel M. Green
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June, 1962
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August, 1965

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

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A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: John Hunter Tavern was typical mid-eighteenth century wooden frame building with good examples of panelling, vertical wainscoting, trim and hardware. Large sections of structural system were visible. Unusual fireplace foundation was noteworthy.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor, in danger of collapsing (1962). Demolished c. 1964.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 20'-6" x 40'-1", five bays, two stories, rectangular shape.
2. Foundations: Fieldstone rubble with some brick in south wall and at bulkhead.
3. Wall construction: Exterior walls were covered by horizontal wooden siding with 4- $\frac{1}{2}$ " exposed surfaces and $\frac{1}{2}$ " beads. Siding was nailed 1'-10" on center with hand-made nails to 1"-thick feathered horizontal sheathing. Siding, some extending full length of house, abutted 1" x 4" corner boards. Traces of red stain or paint were visible on siding.
4. Framing: Wooden frame of modified post and girt system was secured by trenails. Structural members were hand-hewn. Some showed traces of pit sawing. Corner and intermediate posts showed indications of having been encased. Stud walls and partitions.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: No porches or stoops. Bulkhead to basement was closed with wooden hatch covered with earth.
6. Chimneys: Two parallel brick foundation walls of central chimney occupied area 9'-0" x 6'-6" above stone footings with 4'-2- $\frac{1}{2}$ " open space between them and were spanned by platform of 8" x 8" beams covered by unmortared stone rubble. Original chimney measured approximately 7'-0" x 5'-6" at first floor (three fireplaces) and 6'-0" x 4'-0" at second floor (two fireplaces). Patched roof sheathing indicated dimensions approximately 4'-0" x 4'-0" above roof. Original chimney was replaced c. 1930 by small brick chimney thimble for stove pipes.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Front doorway was rectangular, originally had transom, no sidelights. Fragments of frontispiece jamb trim remained. Door was nineteenth-century. Earlier front door was stored in attic. Rear had modern plank door.
- b. Windows and shutters: 1878 woodcut indicates original sash was nine-over-nine-light. Wooden double-hung two-over-two-light sash on first floor, six-over-six-light on second floor, four-over-four-light in gables. Frames and sash were mortised, tenoned and doweled. Rails and muntins were thin. Some old glass survived. Window trim molding had cut finishing nails. No shutters.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof, ridge parallel with front, 1878 woodcut shows wooden shingles. Comparatively modern building paper on wooden sheathing over 3- $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 3- $\frac{1}{4}$ " purlins 3'-10" on center between trusses 7'-8" on center.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Boxed eaves on north and south elevations, wooden cornice. Roof did not project beyond gable plane. Barge boards tapered toward gable apex.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: Full basement under entire structure.
- b. First floor: Large rooms running depth of house opened from central entry with stairs against chimney wall. Small room at rear of chimney and basement stairs under entry stairs were entered from east room, which was cut into four spaces by later partitions.
- c. Second floor: Original arrangement had two rooms opening from front hall, finished closet at rear of chimney. West partition removed. Modern partitions in east room. Traces of original partitions remained on flooring.
- d. Attic: Single space, unfinished.

2. Stairways: Eleven-riser entry stairs to second floor were HABS U-shaped, had winders. Eleven-riser hall stairs to attic ME were L-shaped, had winders. Nine-riser stairs from east 12-70P.V. room to basement had straight run. 1-
3. Flooring: Wooden boards varied from 0'-6" to 2'-6" in width. Basement had earth floor. Attic floor had been removed.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls had hair plaster on "accor-dion," or split, lath and milled lath above vertical wain-scoting averaging 1'-5" wide with feathered edges and quarter rounds. First-floor fireplace walls and stair partition in entry were paneled. Ceiling had hair plaster.
5. Doorways and doors: Door casings were simple. Doorway from entry to east room had heart-shaped opening in doorhead. Most doors had four hand-hewn panels or were bead-edged board doors. One modern paneled door.
6. Decorative features and trim: Variety of eighteenth and nineteenth-century moldings. Corner cupboards and 3'-4"-high wainscot in first-floor west room and second-floor paneled walls removed c. 1920.
7. Notable hardware. Variety of iron thumb latches, H hinges (one with leather washers), strap hinges on door in attic, old nails and spikes, and iron hook for lighting fixture on ceiling of east room remained in house.
8. Lighting: Modern electric outlets.
9. Heating: First-floor fireplaces closed, brick hearths remained. East and north fireplaces probably used for cooking. Second-floor fireplaces and related trim removed c. 1930.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: House faced south on north side of Route 24 (Topsham-Bowdoinham Road) on knoll 2.1 miles from Topsham Town Hall. No enclosures, outbuildings, walks, or landscaping. Structure was surrounded by open fields.

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